

Frequently Asked Questions - Family Violence Death Review Committee

About the Committee

What is the Family Violence Death Review Committee (FVDRC)?

The Committee is an internal arms-length committee of the Community and Social Services Ministry and derives its mandate from the *Protection Against Family Violence Act* (PAFVA).

The membership includes representatives from legal; enforcement; mental health; victim advocates; and research/academia that have extensive knowledge or experience in the area of family violence (as per the PAFVA).

Members are appointed through a Ministerial Order for a term of three years and the Committee reports to the Minister.

What is the Committee's mandate?

Under the PAFVA, the Committee has the responsibility to review family violence deaths in Alberta and make recommendations to the Minister related to program, policy and service delivery for the prevention of family violence.

What is the Committee's scope of work?

The Committee conducts systemic case reviews of family violence deaths related to intimate partner violence. These incidents may or may not involve children. Victims can include a current or former intimate partner, children, other family members or bystanders.

The Committee identifies the presence or absence of systemic issues, gaps or shortcomings of each case. They also spot trends, risk factors and patterns from the cases they review.

The Committee then makes its recommendations in the form of a report for government action.

Why does Alberta need a Family Violence Death Review Committee?

Between 2008 and 2015, there were 132 deaths as a result of family violence in Alberta. The Committee was established in 2013 under the PAFVA to provide a more comprehensive mechanism to review family violence deaths in Alberta.

These reviews are crucial to improving and shaping government's response to family violence. They provide a more accurate picture of what family violence looks like in Alberta, as well as a comprehensive analysis of trends and contributing risk factors.

Is Alberta the only province that has a Committee?

There are five other Family Violence Death Review Committees across Canada: British Columbia, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, Ontario and New Brunswick.

How is the Committee accountable to Albertans?

The Committee reports to the Minister of Community and Social Services. The FVDRC provides the Minister with a number of reports.

- An annual report detailing the work of the committee for the year;
- Case Review Reports on the circumstances leading up to the deaths; and
- Public reports with recommendations.

The Minister is accountable to Albertans for the Committee's operations and for tabling the FVDRC Annual Reports in the Legislature.

How does the ministry support the work of the Committee?

Community and Social Services is responsible for providing secretariat support to the FVDRC, which involves:

- managing the recruitment, selection and appointment of its members;
- supporting the committee's work in reviewing cases; and
- facilitating the implementation of accepted recommendations for government action through the Interdepartmental Committee on Family Violence.

What is different about the Family Violence Death Review Committee from other Government of Alberta death review processes and boards?

First, reviews are conducted by the Committee after all other investigations and proceedings – including criminal trials and appeals – have been completed.

Second, the Committee conducts paper reviews of the systems involved in the incidents. There is no direct contact with impacted individuals, families or professionals.

Finally, the Committee has the autonomy to select cases for in-depth review from all the family violence death incidents. There is no referral process and the Committee cannot be compelled to review a specific case.

Does the Committee have legal authority to lay charges as a result of their case review?

No, the Committee does not begin its work until all legal proceedings are completed.

The findings of the Committee must not include any findings of legal responsibility or any conclusions of law.

As per the PAVFA, the Committee reviews cases in a manner that is confidential and makes for systems and societal change.

What is the difference between the Family Violence Death Review Committee and the Fatality Inquiry processes conducted by Justice and Solicitor General?

The review conducted by the FVDRC is a confidential process that reports its findings to the Minister of Community and Social Services, whereas fatality inquiries are a public process conducted by the courts, with public reporting completed by a Judge.

Committee In-Depth Case Reviews

Are all family violence death cases reviewed by the Committee?

Yes.

Since becoming operational in February 2014, the Committee reviewed 89 incidents of family violence that resulted in 132 deaths that occurred from January 2008 to December 2015. For this seven-year period, the cases were sorted into two categories – eligible or ineligible.

Eligible cases are those in which the police investigation is complete and the matter has been resolved through the courts. Ineligible cases have not yet been processed through the criminal justice system, but would be considered once that process is complete. The Committee then selects a number of eligible cases for an in-depth review.

What criteria does the Committee use for in-depth reviews?

The process for selecting cases for in-depth review is directed by the Chair, whose authority is outlined in the Committee's Mandate and Roles document. The Committee has the autonomy to determine which cases will be the subject of an in-depth review based on:

- the most recent cases;
- those representing a diversity of ages;
- geographical locations;
- the status of the relationships; and
- ethnicity and/or culture.

This provides a good cross-section of cases that reflect Alberta's changing demographics.

Can the Committee be directed to review specific cases?

There is no referral process. Individuals or organizations, cannot direct the Committee to review specific cases.

Why do the case review reports not disclose personal information about the perpetrator or the victim?

Under the PAVFA, the Committee reviews cases in a manner that is confidential and makes for systems and societal change. They deal with sensitive personal information and the Committee has a legislated and moral obligation to protect the privacy of the people involved.

The legislation clearly states: "a publicly released version of a case report MUST NOT disclose the name, or any identifying information about the individual whose death is the subject of the review or any other individual involved in the death."

This is why public reports contain no identifying information. This provision was deliberate. It balances the need for transparency and protects the privacy of surviving relatives so as not to re-traumatize them.

This also means that families of the deceased are not notified or involved because it is a systemic case review of the circumstances and not a public fatality inquiry.